

Waterbourne
Baptism of the Lord
January 12, 2020
Trinity Bixby
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[Psalm 29:1-4, 10-11 \(CEB\)](#)

You, divine beings! Give to the LORD—
 give to the LORD glory and power!
²Give to the LORD the glory due his name!
 Bow down to the LORD in holy splendor!
³The LORD's voice is over the waters;
 the glorious God thunders;
 the LORD is over the mighty waters.
⁴The LORD's voice is strong;
 the LORD's voice is majestic.
¹⁰The LORD sits enthroned over the floodwaters;
 the LORD sits enthroned—king forever!
¹¹Let the LORD give strength to his people!
 Let the LORD bless his people with peace!

[Matthew 3:13-17 \(CEB\)](#)

On this cold winter morning, after our first snowfall of the year, I have a warm memory to share with you. As a kid, I spent many a summer at Camp Batawagama in Iron County, Michigan. Now, Iron County is in the Upper Peninsula – that little strip of land nestled between Canada, Wisconsin, and Michigan's lower peninsula – and so, let's just say, it never got Oklahoma hot. Even so, we loved jumping into the lake, especially from the diving platform that the older campers could swim out to. From that high platform, we campers could imagine being cliff divers, in far-off Australia – poised, overlooking the waters below. What a rush, to jump from that platform, wind whistling past, as the waters below rushed up to greet us with an enveloping refreshment. Once you were under the surface, of course, the lake was pretty murky. It could sometimes be difficult to find your way back up to the surface – especially as we challenged each other to

dive deeper each time before bobbing back up to the surface.

After a thrilling dive, I often liked to lean back and just be buoyed up by the water, resting in the calm, while the water muffled the sounds around me. It was peaceful, comforting, and one of the few ways that an introvert like me could find space somewhat on my own. In many of those moments, I would close my eyes and rest in the warm sun and cool water, casting my mind out to big thoughts of the Creator who provided these experiences, and how our lives are much like the whole process.

Sometimes, we tire ourselves out, treading water. Sometimes, life rushes at us like the water seemed to after jumping off the high platform. Sometimes, we find ourselves lost in the murky depths, unsure of which way is up. And sometimes, we can relax into the gentle buoyant care of our heavenly parent, whom Jesus called Father, remembering that even as Jesus slipped beneath the surface of the river Jordan, he rose again in the presence of his cousin, John, and in the love of God.

In the Presbyterian church, we talk about baptism being a sign and a seal of God's love. Just in case it's been a while, a sign *points* to something – in the case of baptism, it points to God's love. Just as God called out to Jesus at his baptism, saying, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased," so, too, in our baptism does God call out to each of us – "You are my beloved child. I am well pleased in you." God's voice is full of glory, according to Psalm 29 – and this glorious voice has reminded each and every one of us that we are loved, that we belong to God, that God sees the good in us. And like Jesus, we find ourselves rising out of the water, being carried by God's love. We can float in God's love, just like at summer camp lakes.

Baptism is also a seal of God's love on us – a seal like a fancy wax seal on a letter, or a seal like you find on the packaging of products – it's a seal that says we belong to God. It's a stamp of ownership, stating to the world around us that, "if lost, please return to the church, care of Jesus." And yes, we do find ourselves getting lost, whether by accident or on purpose, but as long as we remember that if we relax into God's care, we'll bob right back up again to where we're supposed to

be. It's like we're bourn up by the waters of baptism every moment of our lives.

As a seal on us, baptism can also act like divine goo-gone, preventing the labels of the world – and those we add ourselves - from sticking on us. Jill Duffield, editor of the Presbyterian Outlook magazine, puts it beautifully:

What difference would it make if we peeled off all of the labels we affix on ourselves and others and remembered first and foremost that we belong to and are beloved by God?... We spend so much time and expend so much energy and resources searching for a sense of worth and worthiness when God wants desperately to show us that our value is a given, unearned and permanent. We are beloved. We are delightful. We belong... Through Jesus Christ we have not only access to the will and Word of God, we are united to God and one another. Could we begin to understand ourselves and others first and foremost in these terms? ¹

If we start to understand ourselves in this way, as Jill challenges us, we relax into God's care, rather than striving mightily. It's like the timeless advice of generation to generation about what to do if you find yourself in quicksand. How'd you get there? Doesn't matter. If you find yourself in quicksand, first and foremost, don't struggle. Lay back, spread your arms out, try to make yourself as big as possible. That way, you maximize your buoyancy – and keep yourself from sinking deeper by thrashing about. Instead, take deep, strong breaths, and use gentle motions to reach the edge and pull yourself out. Similarly, if we relax into God's care, we find that God supports us, carrying us like a waterbourne lily. But we can easily wear ourselves out by furiously treading water – by turning from God's love and trying to make ourselves full and satisfied by the things of the world, whether wealth, love, power, knowledge, or security. The more we chase after those things, the further we sink from them. Instead, as we turn towards God's vision of ourselves, we will find that we have enough and more than enough of all of them – enough for ourselves, and enough to share.

¹ Jill Duffield, "Baptism of the Lord" in Presbyterian Outlook, January 2020, <https://pres-outlook.org/2020/01/baptism-of-the-lord-january-12-2020/>

The best part of being bourn by God is that whether you find yourself dreading a big decision – like whether to jump into the lake from the high platform – or lost and confused about which way is up, whether you are treading water, or relaxing in God’s splendid care – God is with you through it all. God cares for you, and you always have the reassurance that God has called you a beloved child.

May you be bourn by the waters of God’s grace and care. May you be buoyed up by the Spirit, and reach out to others to offer the Spirit’s buoyancy to them. And may Jesus lead you to the best places in your life journey – where you will thrive and where you are needed. Amen.